

Impacts of the Russian River Sandbar on Wildlife



Copyright © 2002-2008 Kenneth & Gabrielle
Adelman, California Coastal Records Project
www.Californiacoastline.org

Harbor Seals

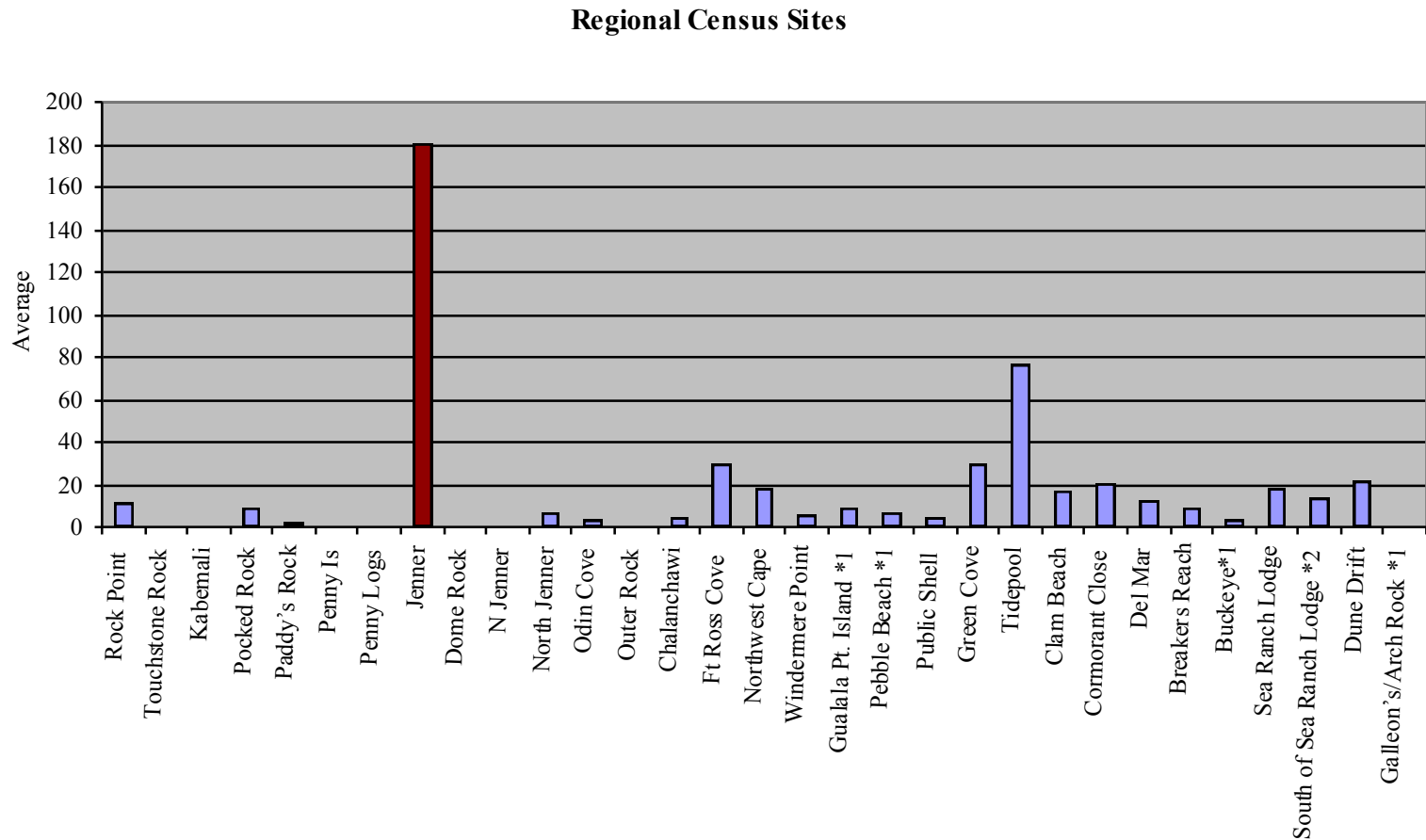


Jamie Hall Photo

Jenner Is a Major North Coast Harbor Seal Haulout

- At molt, it is the largest between Drake's Estero and the mouth of the Eel River
- State seal census shows it has been important California haulout since the 1980s

Jenner Is Sonoma County's Major Haulout



Jenner is also one of the most intensively studied haulouts on the West Coast

- State summer census began in 1982
- Monthly counts begin in 1988
- Elinor Twohy's Daily Counts since Linda Hansen's study of harbor ecology, completed in 1993
- Regional Census since 1998
- So we know trends over years and seasons

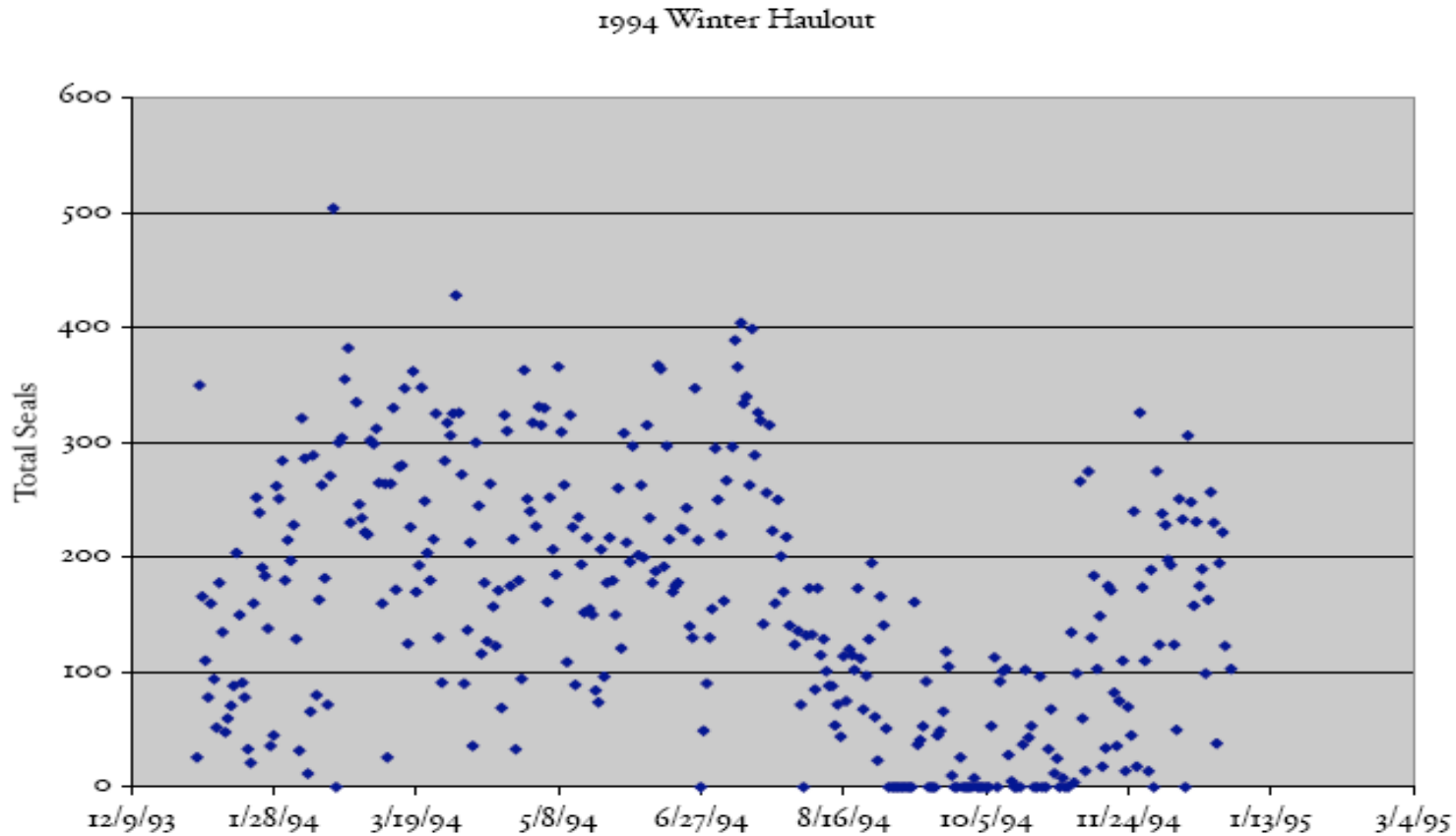
Elinor Twohy's Daily Seal Census Reveals Two Types of Seasonal Patterns



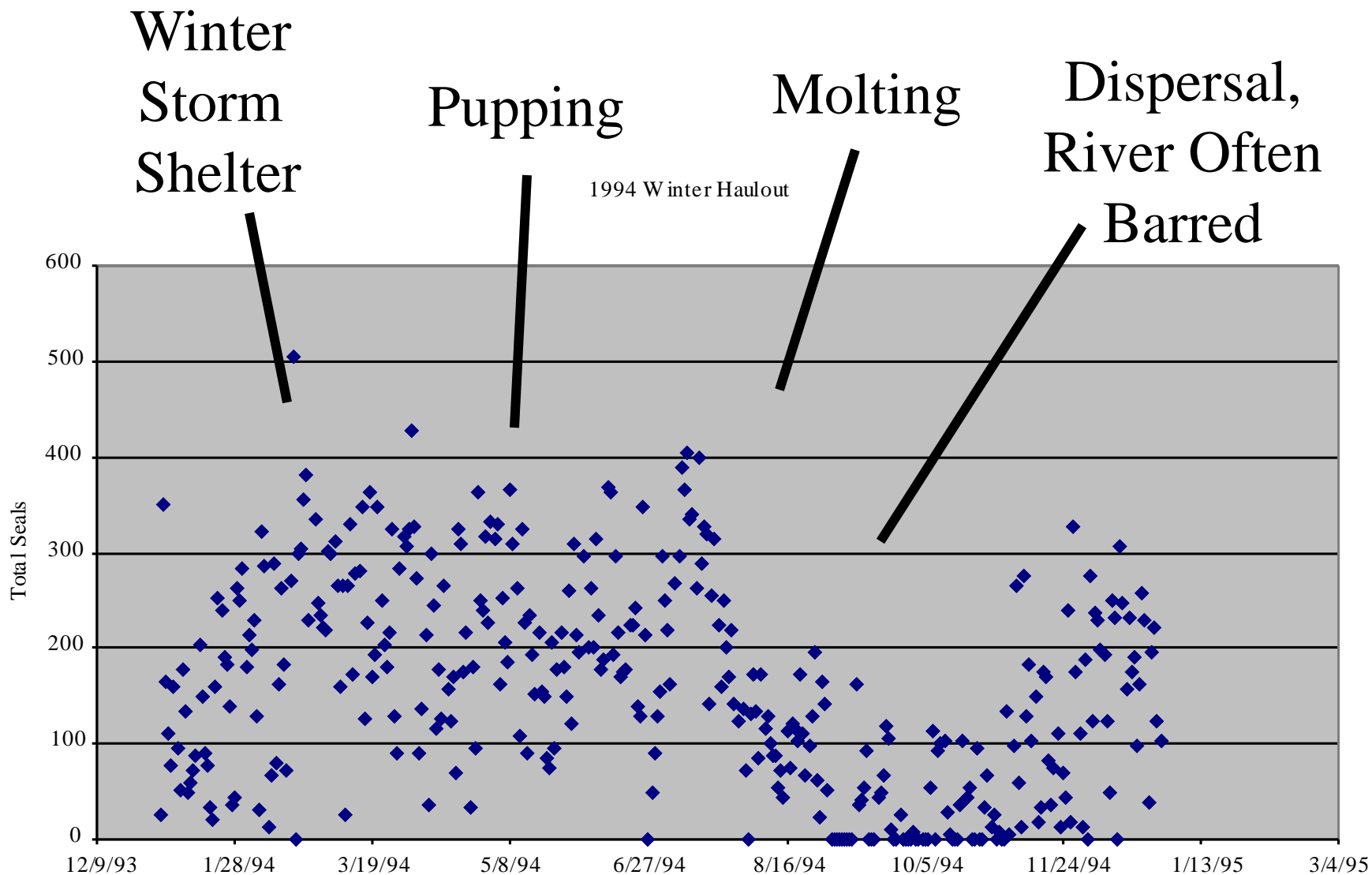
Joe Mortenson Photo

Haulout With Winter Maximum in 1994

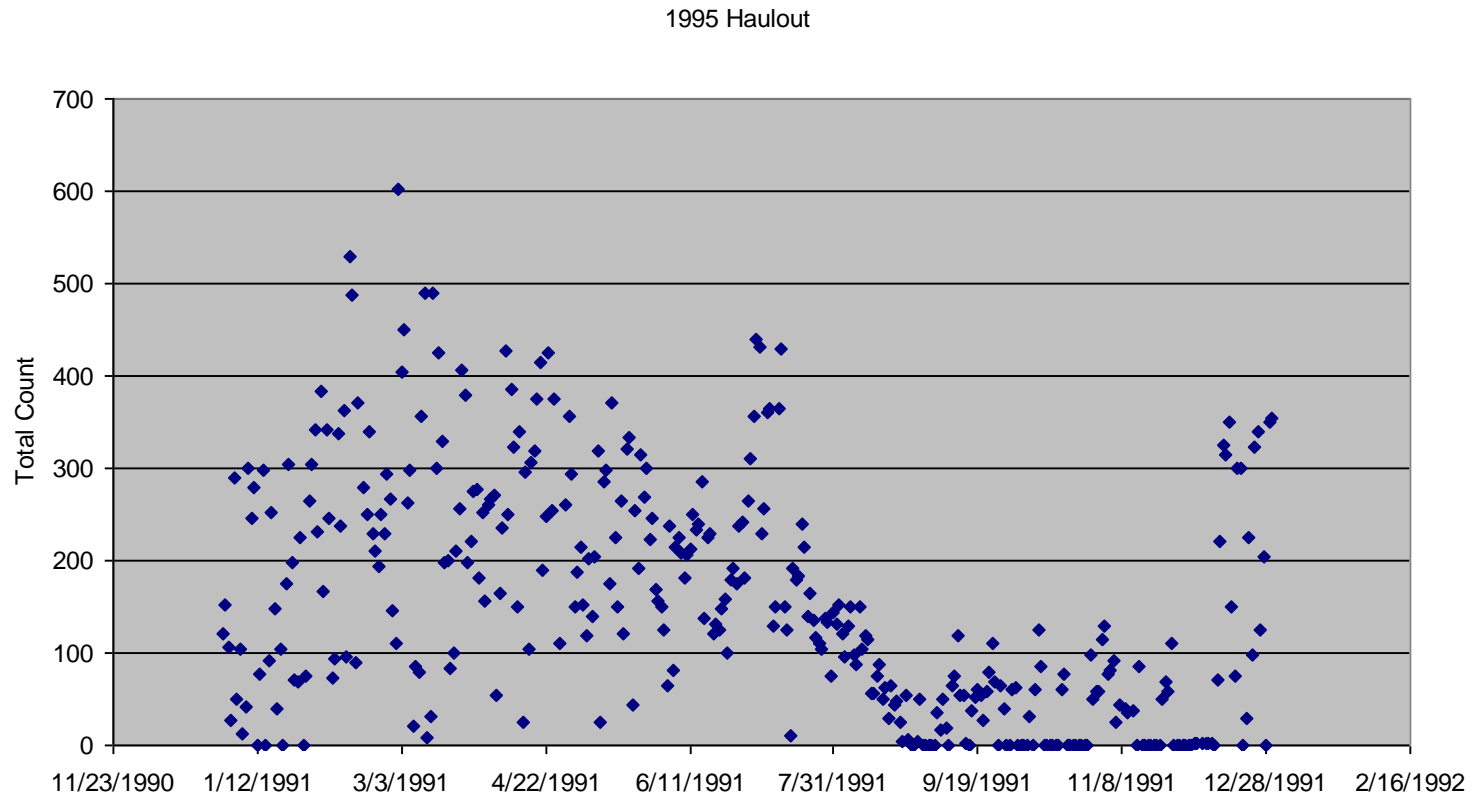
Original Pattern Observed in 1990s



Original Seal Annual Cycle Components



1995 Haulout, Winter Maximum *Showing Similar Pattern*



Jenner Seals Came to Avoid or Flee R-1, A Maturing Elephant Seal Bull



Jamie Hall Photo

Ultimately, R-1 Devastated Jenner Haulout

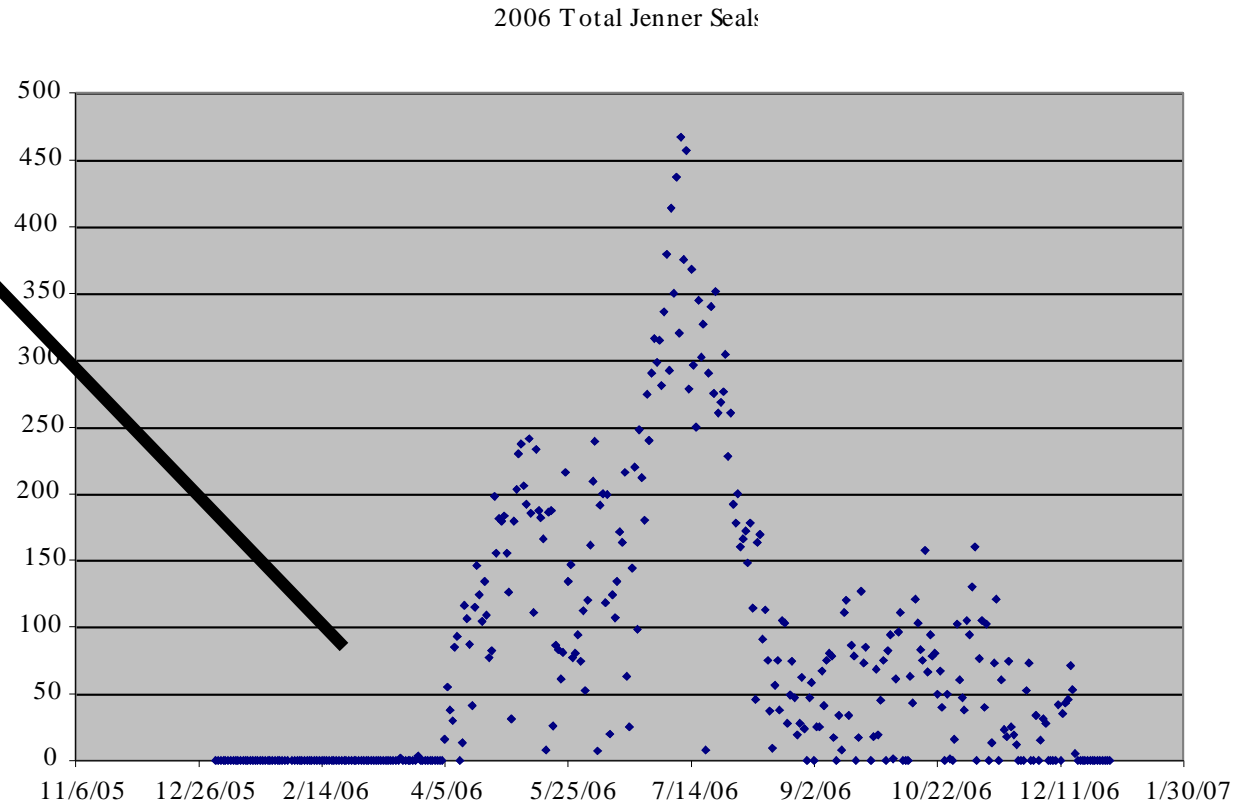
Lisa Hug
Photo



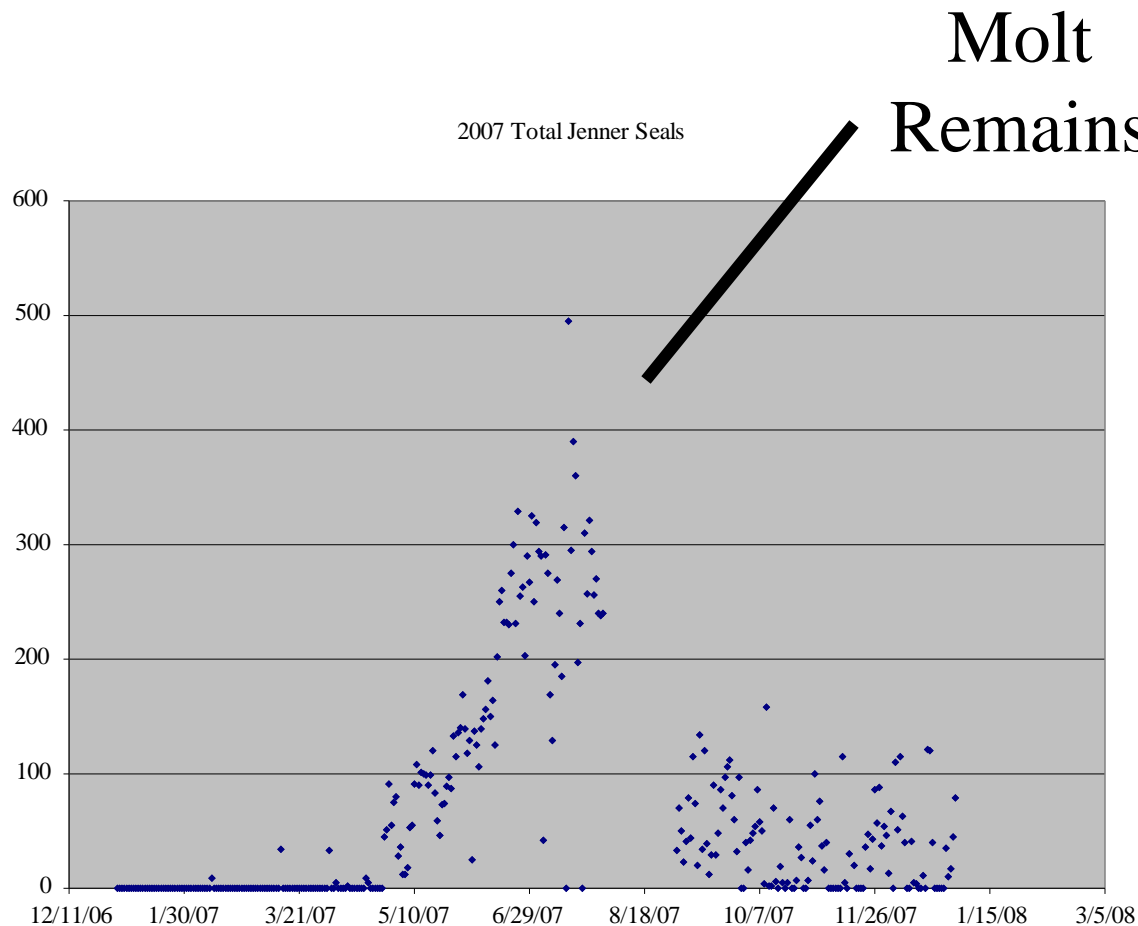
2006 Haulout, with R-1 Present

Winter Haulout Disappears

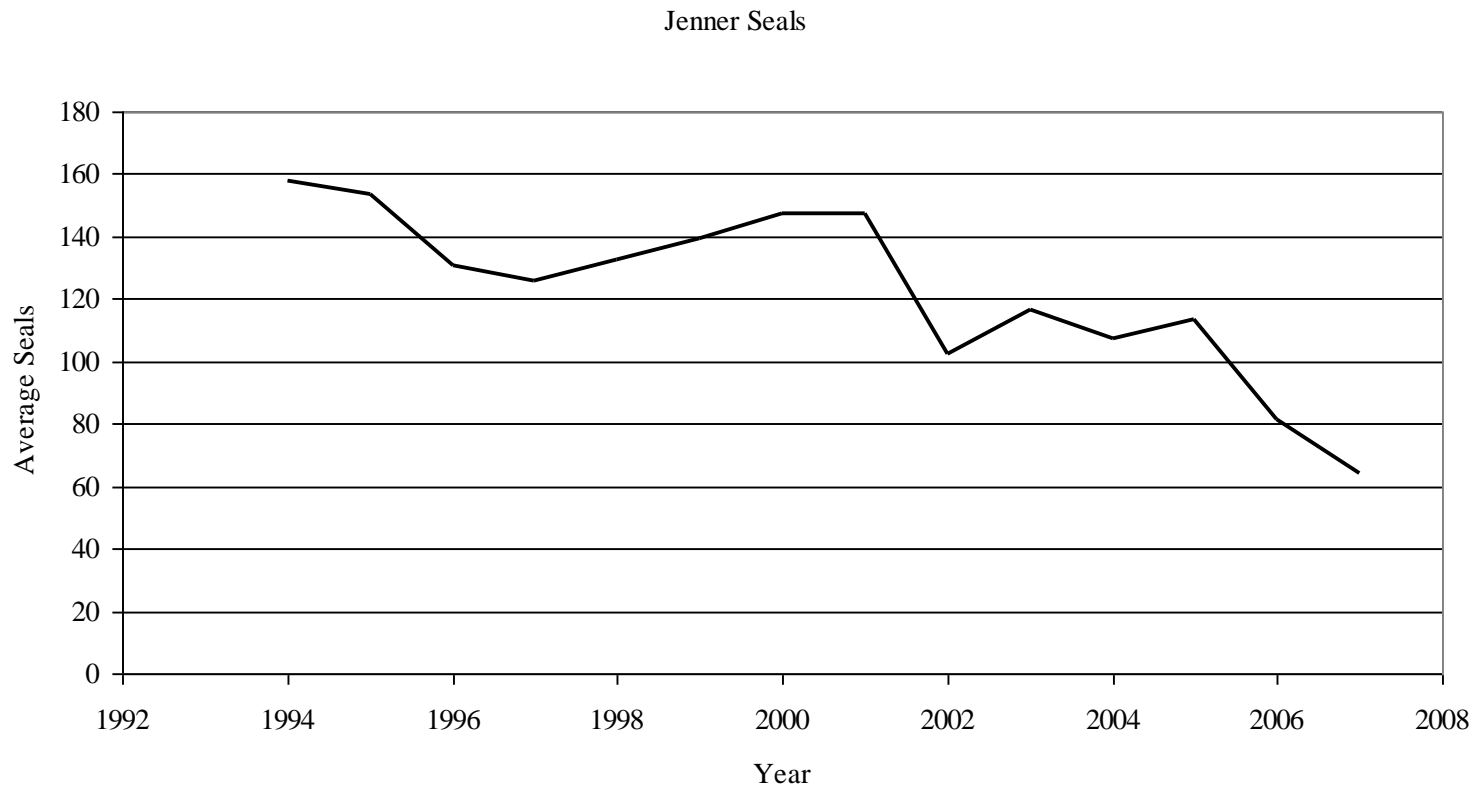
Haulout
Vanishes

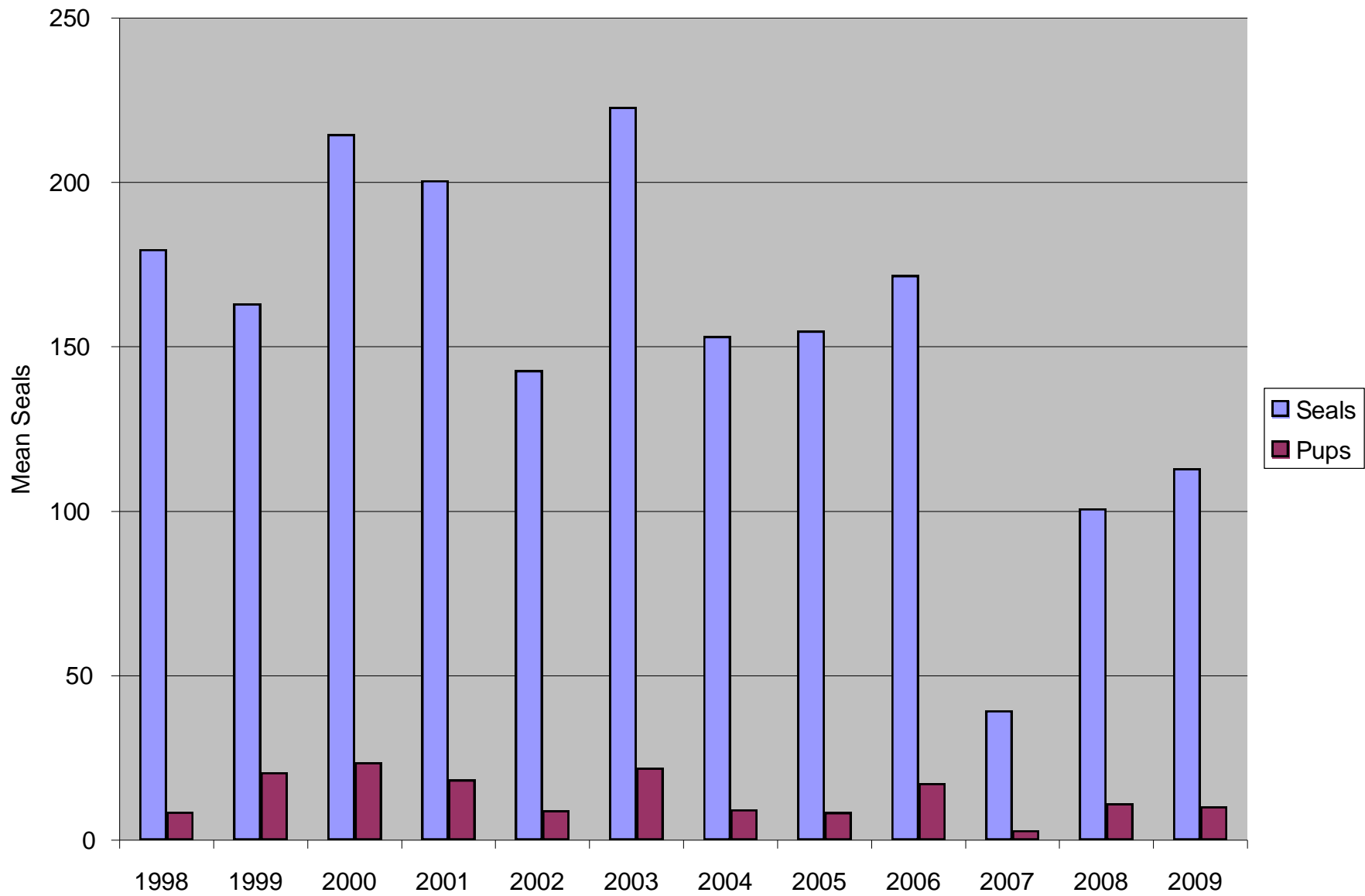


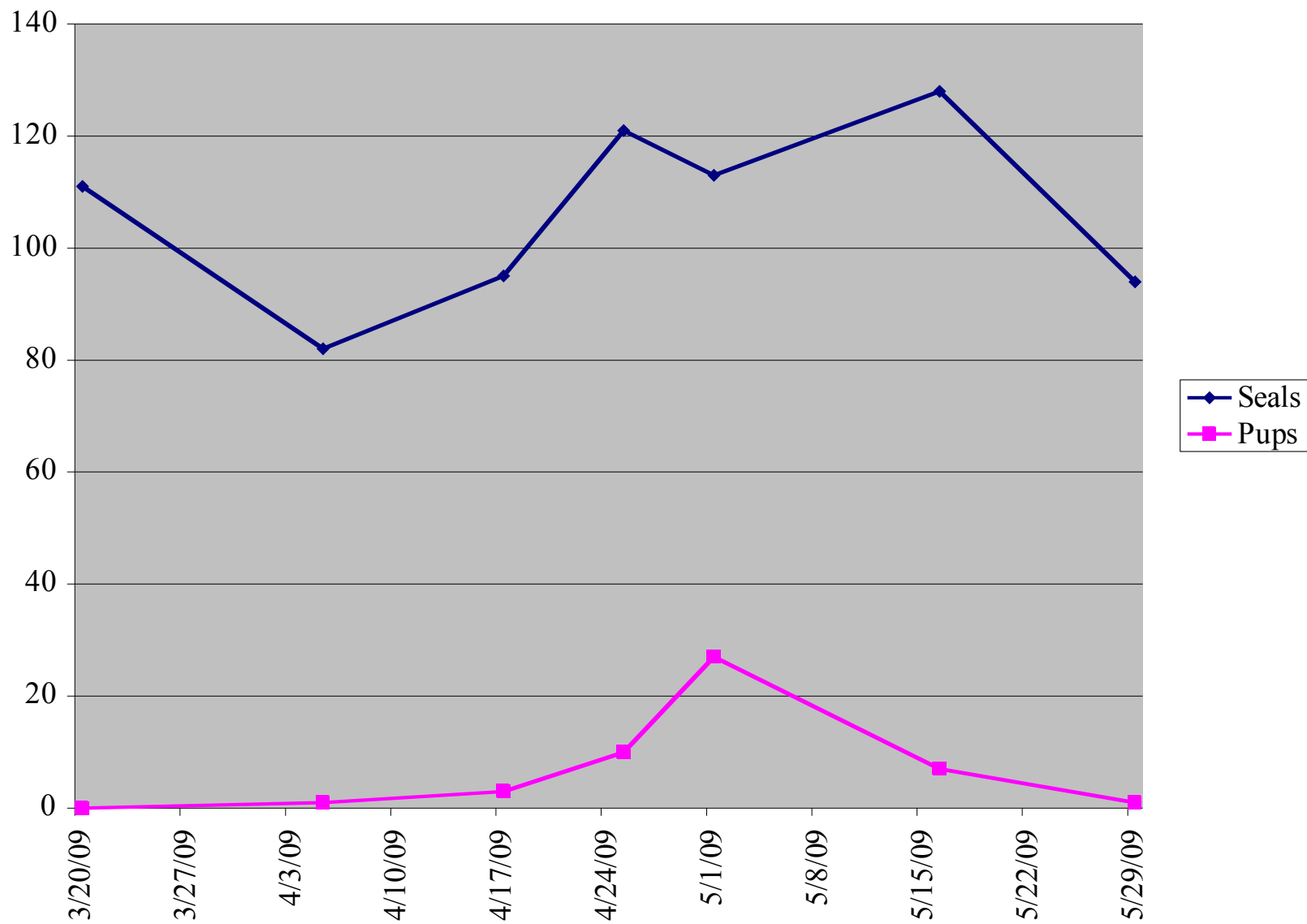
In 2007 R-1 Lingered into Breeding Season Haulout Numbers Were Reduced Save for Molt



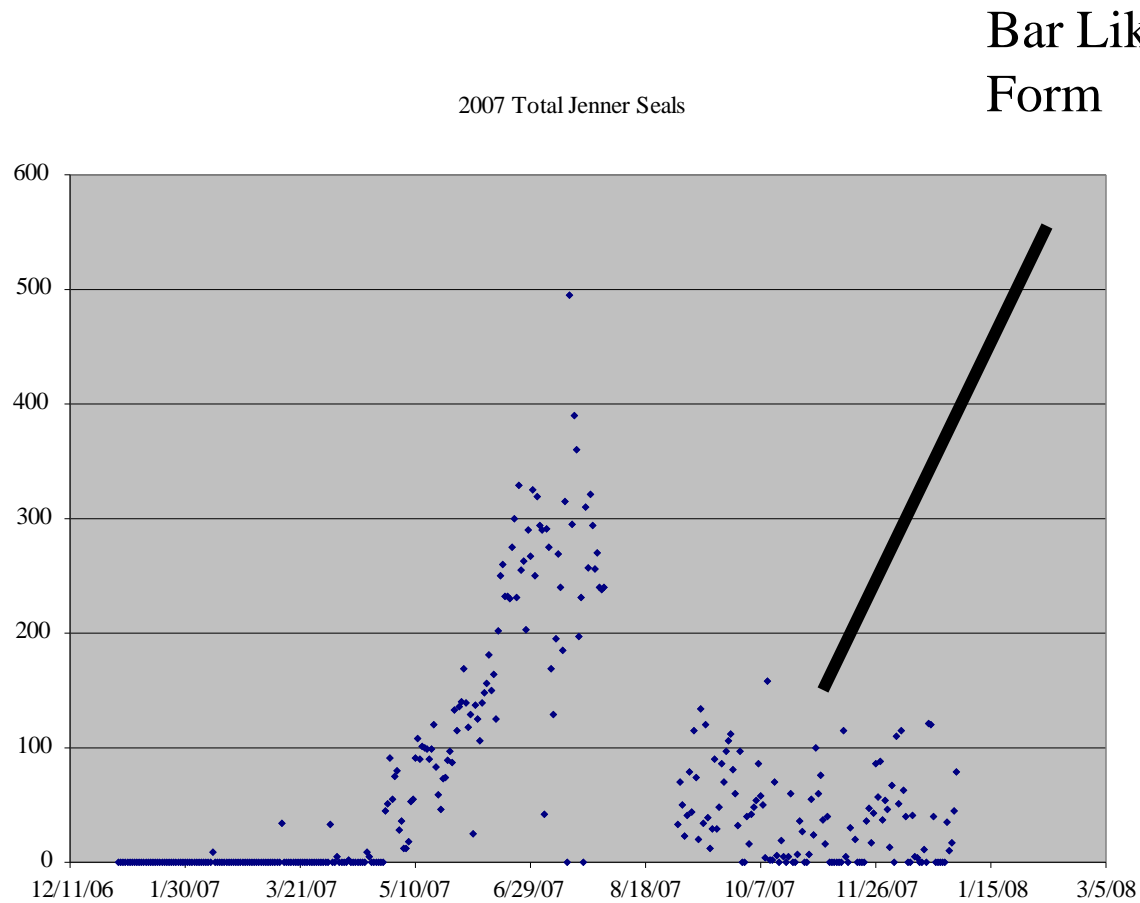
Decline in Jenner Haulout Yearly Average





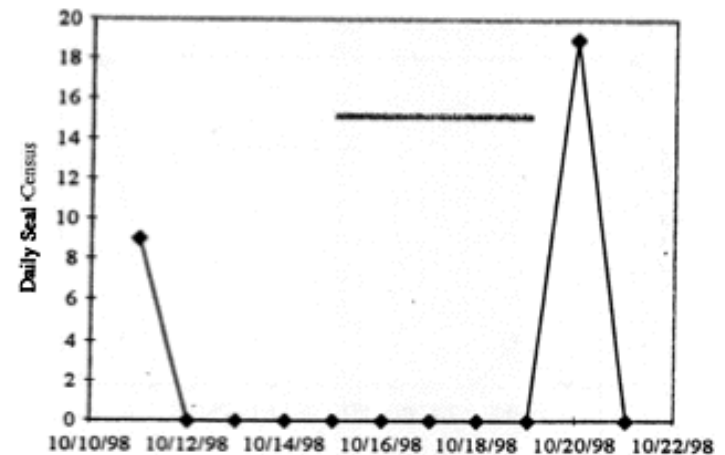
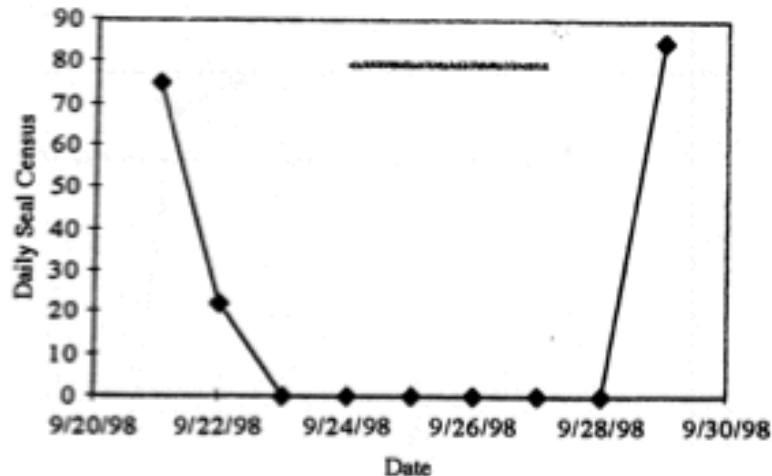


In Fall, Seal Counts Drop at the Time When the Sandbar Tends to Form



Sandbar Affects Harbor Seal Colony Strongly In Fall

- *Sandbar indicated by bar in graphs*
- *Seals often abandon Jenner when bar forms*
- *Quick return after breach*



Possible Results of Sandbar Earlier in the Year

- We know a single source of disturbance like R-1 can wipe out a haulout
- Similar case of haulout elimination in part as a result of early morning walkers and other factors at Strawberry Point in Marin County
- Data shows that sandbar consistently reduces Harbor Seal haulout population
- Prolonged sandbar without breaching may reduce or eliminate this significant Harbor Seal haulout in molt

Jenner is Also for the Birds



Kevin O'Connor Photo

Hundreds of Birds May Rest on the Bar

- Rest is vital not just for seals and people, but also for birds
- Many species of coastal birds congregate on the Russian River Spits
- Some come from our local colonies, others from distant rookeries
- Birds are put to flight by people walking across the bar and often abandon the area

Jenner Sea Mammals and Sea Birds Enjoy Legal Protections



Brown Pelicans at Jenner are a Bird of Special Concern under the Endangered Species Act and Heerman's Gulls are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty



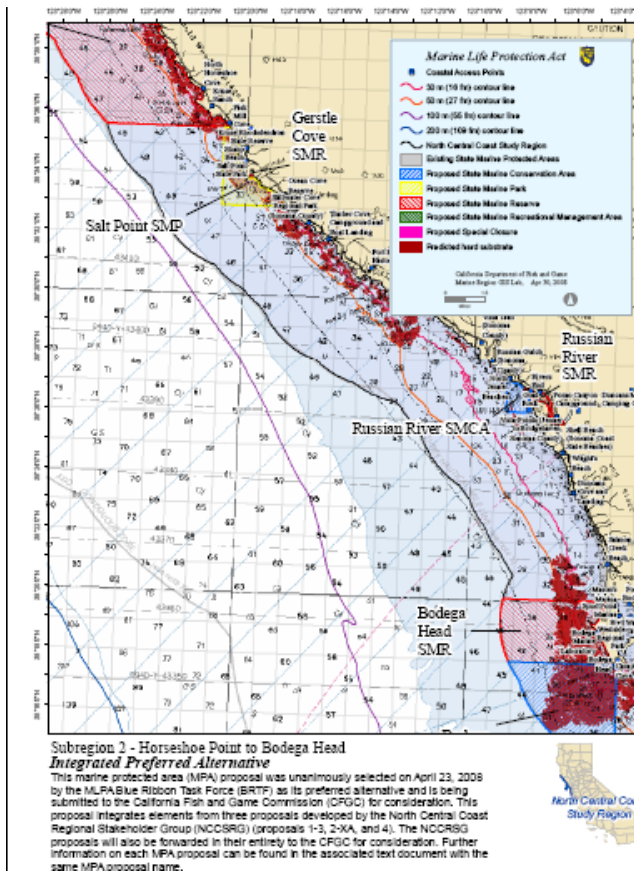


Photo by George Zastrow

Marine Mammal Protection Act Covers Seals, Sea Lions and Whales



North Central Coast Marine Life Protection Plan is Being Finalized



Marine Life Protection Act Provides General Protection

- Provisionally the Outer Mouth will be a State Marine Conservation Area
- And the Estuary will be a State Marine Reserve

Extension of the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary

- GFNMS likely to be extended northward shortly, bringing more protections to Jenner and the coast
- Thus Jenner may be protected by many laws and agencies, just like Bolinas Lagoon



Many Other Species Will Affected by Closure

- The Estuary is a nursery for dungeness crabs
- How will they and other species be affected?



In Summary, the River Mouth Is and Will Be Protected

- The Migratory Bird Treaty
- The Marine Mammal Protection Act
- Marine Life Protection Act
- Extension of the Gulf of the Farallones
National Marine Sanctuary

But how do these bear on the
Biological Opinion?

Why Not Integrated Management?

- Manage for all species, not just two
- Consider the breadth of consequences
- Take holistic approach
- There are many stakeholders at the mouth of the Russian River

Finally Remember The Jenner Seals are Ambassadors for the Marine Environment

The seals link children,
visitors, all of us, to the
estuary and to the sea



Kevin O'Connor Photo

Jenner Seals

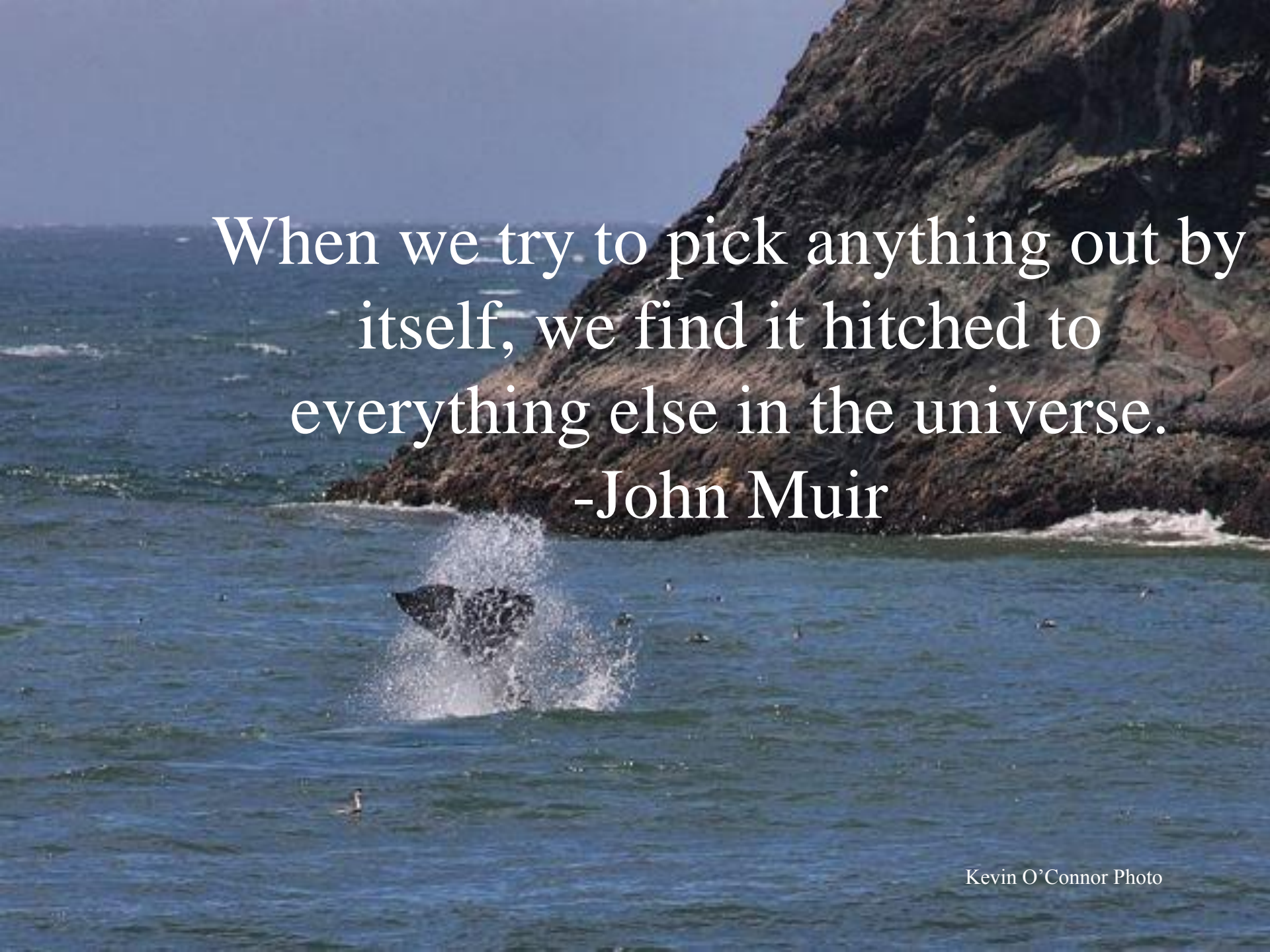
Ambassadors to the Marine Environment

- Harbor Seals provide a connection for visitors to the otherwise inaccessible ocean environment
- Beach, estuary and Route 1 overlook provide public exceptional visual access to the river/ocean interface
- The overlook is a destination for thousands of travelers along the Sonoma County coast who stop just to see the Harbor Seals

State Park
Seal Watchers
Educate the Public
while Protecting
the Seals.



Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods supports the State Park Volunteer in Parks Programs. Seal Watch was their first program and Seal Watchers have been protecting the Harbor Seal colony since 1985.

A photograph of a whale breaching the ocean surface. The whale's dark, rounded back is visible above the water, creating a large splash of white water. In the background, a steep, rocky cliff rises from the water's edge. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall scene is dynamic and captures a moment of wildlife in its natural habitat.

When we try to pick anything out by
itself, we find it hitched to
everything else in the universe.

-John Muir